

Message Text

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ACTION AF-06

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-07 L-02

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 COME-00 EB-07 LAB-04 SIL-01 /063 W

----- 109042

R 301521Z JAN 75

FM AMEMBASSY LAGOS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7785

INFO AMCONSUL IBADAN

AMCONSUL KADUNA

C O N F I D E N T I A L LAGOS 0973

E.O.: 11652: GDS

TAGS: ELAB, PINT, NI

SUBJ: GOWON WARNS AGAINST PLOTTERS USING LABOR UNREST

REF: LAGOS 0879

SUMMARY: IN WAKE SMC MEETING WHICH REPORTEDLY APPROVED TOUGH FMG LINE ON LABOR UNREST, GOWON DELIVERED PUBLIC WARNING AGAINST "ILL-MOTIVATED ELEMENTS" SEEKING CAPITALIZE ON GRIEVANCES FOR POLITICAL PURPOSES AND CAUTIONED THAT FMG TOLERANCE HAS ITS LIMITS. GOWON CHARGES OF POLITICAL MOTIVATION MAY WELL HAVE SOME BASIS IN FACT, BUT NONETHELESS APPEAR SERIOUSLY UNDERESTIMATES REAL GRIEVANCES STEMMING FROM FMG WHITE PAPER. END SUMMARY.

1. IN WAKE TWO-DAY MEETING OF SUPREME MILITARY COUNCIL (SMC), GOVON ON JANUARY 29 USED SWEARING-IN CEREMONY FOR NEW FEDERAL COMMISSIONERS AS PLATFORM FOR ISSUING STRONG WARNING THAT THERE IS LIMIT TO WHAT FMG AS RESPONSIBLE GOVERNMENT CAN TOLERATE IN FACE OF "CALCULATED PLAN TO DISRUPT ORDERLY PROGRESS". NOTING EVENTS OF PAST THREE WEEKS, GOWON STATED THERE IS EVIDENCE "SOME ILL-MOTIVATED ELEMENTS" ARE SEEKING TO MISUSE WORKER DEMANDS, SOME OF WHICH ARE GENUINE, IN ORDER "PRECIPITATE PARALYSIS OF GOVERNMENT AUTHORITY". FMG'S
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"HONEST ATTEMPTS" TO IMPROVE WORKERS' STANDARDS OF LIVING WERE

"DELIBERATELY MISINTERPRETED", HE SAID: EFFORTS MADE TO TURN ONE SECTOR OF PUBLIC SERVICE AGAINST ANOTHER; AND "OUTRAGEOUSLY FALSE" REPORTS ON INCREASES MILITARY SALARY SCALES CIRCULATED. NONETHELESS, FMG HAS REFUSED TO BE GOADED INTO DRASTIC ACTION BY SUCH "SUBVERSIVE ACTS", BUT HE IMPLIED THAT IT WAS KEEPING ALL ITS OPTIONS OPEN.

2. GOVERNOR NORTH-CENTRAL STATE AND SMC MEMBER ABBA EYARI SPOKE IN EVEN STRONGER TERMS DURING AIRPORT INTERVIEW SAME DAY, WARNING NATION NOT TO MISTAKE CIVILITY OF MILITARY REGIME FOR WEAKNESS, AND TO RESPECT DECREES AGAINST STRIKE ACTIONS. HE CHARACTERIZED PRESENT INDUSTRIAL UNREST AS "DIRECT SLAP AT LAWS OF LAND", AND URGED WORKERS TO SETTLE WAGE TALKS AMICABLY RATHER THAN EMBARK ON UNNECESSARY INDUSTRIAL ACTIONS. EYARI CONCLUDED THAT FMG WOULD USE POLICE TO ENFORCE GOVERNMENT DECREES AND CALL IN ARMY ONLY AS LAST RESORT.

3. WELL-PLACED FMG SOURCE REPORTS THAT SMC DEVOTED BULK ITS MEETING JANUARY 27-28 TO DISCUSSION OF PAPER PREPARED BY LABOR PERMSEC KOKU ON CURRENT INDUSTRIAL STRIFE. ACCORDING SOURCE, SMC DECIDED CONTINUE USE DECREE 53 AND SPECIAL CONCILIATORS (LAGOS 11829) AS MECHANISM FOR FMG EFFORTS TO SOLVE CURRENT INDUSTRIAL UNREST. LABOR MINISTRY IS TO UNDERTAKE EXTENSIVE CONTACTS WITH TRADE UNION LEADERS TO ADVISE THEM OF FMG'S SERIOUSNESS ON THIS MATTER, AND TO STRESS DETENTION POSSIBILITIES IN DECREE 53.

4. COMMENT: THESE LATEST DEVELOPMENTS LEND FURTHER SUPPORT TO HYPOTHESIS ADVANCED REFTTEL THAT FMG PREPARED TO TAKE TOUGHER LINE ON STRIKES AND STRIKE LEADERS, THOUGH DECREE OF FMG DETERMINATION ONLY NOW BEGINNING TO BE TESTED. WITH NUNBE WORKERS ON STRIKE IN PROTEST AGAINST DETENTION OF ANIMASHSUN AND OTHER LABOR LEADERS, FMG MUST MAKE ITS TOUGH LINE STICK BY GETTING STRIKERS BACK TO WORK WITHOUT CAPITULATING OR ELSE WILL EXPOSE ITSELF TO RASH OF FURTHER INDUSTRIAL ACTIONS WHENEVER DETENTION WEAPON IS USED.

5. GOWON'S CHARGES OF POSSIBLE POLITICAL MOTIVATIONS BEHIND LABOR UNREST MAY WELL HAVE SOME BASIS IN FACT, THOUGH HARD EVIDENCE ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE TO PRODUCE. THERE HAVE BEEN REPORTS CONFIDENTIAL

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IN BOTH LAGOS AND KADUNA ABOUT OPPONENTS OF MILITARY REGIME (USUALLY SAID TO BE YORUBA POLITICIANS) ATTEMPTING TO KEEP POT BOILING IN ORDER DISCREDIT FMG AND PERHAPS EVEN BRING DOWN GOVERNMENT. NUNBE LEADER ANIMASHSUN, FOR EXAMPLE, WAS REPORTEDLY IN CONTACT WITH AWOLOWO (WITH WHOM HE HAD CLOSE RELATIONS THROUGH FORMER ACTION GROUP) BOTH BEFORE AND AFTER INITIAL SIX-DAY BANK STRIKE.

6. NEVERTHELESS, SEEING ATTEMPT BY GOWN TO PIN PRINCIPAL RESPONSIBILITY ON POLITICAL AGITATORS GOES WIDE OF MARK AND DOES NOT FACE UP TO EXISTENCE OF GENUINE AND WIDE-SPREAD GRIEVANCES AMONG WORKERS IN BOTH PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTORS. POLITICIANS CERTAINLY WOULD LIKE TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF SITUATION, BUT WORKER UNREST IS MOTIVATED MORE BY REAL ECONOMIC PROBLEMS THAN BY ANY DESIRE TO EMBARRASS OR TOPPLE FMG. IN SIMILAR VEIN, WHILE GOWN UNDOUBTEDLY SINCERE IN CLAIMING THAT FMG IS MAKING "HONEST ATTEMPT" TO IMPROVE WORKERS' LOT, HIS STATEMENT IN EFFECT DENIES POSSIBILITY THAT "UNFOUNDED" OR "MISINFORMED" COMPLAINTS COULD BE RESULT OF FAILURE IN FMG INFORMATION PROGRAM. AS WE HAVE PREVIOUSLY NOTED, FMG INFORMATION EFFORT IN EXPLAINING IMPLICATIONS OF, AND MOTIVES BEHIND, WHITE PAPER ON UDOJI REPORT WAS WOEFULLY LACKING, AND FURTHER "MISINTERPRETATIONS" CERTAIN TO OCCUR UNLESS AND UNTIL IT IS GREATLY IMPROVED.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: LABOR STRIKES, CIVIL DISORDERS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 30 JAN 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: ShawDG
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975LAGOS00973
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750036-0272
From: LAGOS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t1975017/aaaaafx.tel
Line Count: 131
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION AF
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 75 LAGOS 0879
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: ShawDG
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 27 AUG 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <27 AUG 2003 by ElyME>; APPROVED <15 DEC 2003 by ShawDG>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: GOWON WARNS AGAINST PLOTTERS USING LABOR UNREST
TAGS: ELAB, PINT, PINS, NI, (GOWON, YAKUBU)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006